

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

A radio talk by W. G. Campbell, Food and Drug Administration, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, Tuesday, November 28, 1933, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations.

This will be the last of my series of talks about the proposed new food and drug law, Senate 1944, introduced in the Senate by Senator Royal S. Copeland. On December 7th a subcommittee of Senators, headed by Senator Copeland, will begin hearings for the purpose of listening to the arguments of those who favor and those who oppose the measure. Thereafter the fate of the proposed law will lie in the hands of your Senators and Representatives in Congress.

As Chief of the Food and Drug Administration it is my duty to enforce the food and drug law. As an official of the Department of Agriculture it is my duty to disseminate facts about the operations of that law. It is also my duty to point out to you the weaknesses of the law. All my predecessors in office have stressed these weaknesses. They made, and I have continued to make, recommendations for strengthening the law because that law, as it stands now, will not give you consumers all the protection you should have from your Government. Beyond giving you information of the type I have been broadcasting in these Farm and Home Hour talks, I cannot go, for in our democracy it is the function of the people's representatives in Congress to pass the legislation the people desire.

The bill introduced by Senator Copeland, Senate 1944, was drawn up in the Department of Agriculture with the definite purpose of giving the American public the most complete possible protection that the Federal Government can afford, against impure, adulterated, and misbranded foods, drugs and cosmetics. In my previous talks I have illustrated the need for such revised legislation by giving you examples of dangerous cosmetics, worthless and harmful patent medicines, and falsely advertised articles that are now being sold to the detriment of the public.

As I told you in last week's talk, it has become evident that, in spite of the merits of this proposed law, its passage by Congress is going to be bitterly opposed. This opposition is not confined along to those manufacturers whose illicit operations are going to be seriously cramped if not entirely eliminated. Such manufacturers are in the minority. But unfortunately they have succeeded, by misrepresenting the true character of this measure, in enlisting against the bill many people who at heart are just as much interested in protecting the consumer as is the Department of Agriculture. It is amazing how many newspapers have adopted an editorial policy opposing the bill.

The reason for this is not far to seek. The patent medicine industry has made the most definite and far-reaching plans to fight the passage of Senator Copeland's bill. They have unblushingly announced their intention to secure cooperation of newspapers in spreading publicity against the bill, particularly in papers now carrying patent medicine advertising. Another part of their program, as stated in their official announcement,

declares that they will carry to the public by every means available--radio, newspaper, mail and personal contact--the alarming fact that if the bill is adopted, the public will be deprived of the right of self-diagnosis and self-medication, and will be compelled to secure a physician's prescription for many simple needs. In this declaration of one of the plans of campaign against the Copeland bill lies the explanation of letters which have been received from consumers protesting against its passage. I want to declare as emphatically as I can that the statement that the Copeland bill will deprive the public of the right of self-medication is unqualifiedly false. The new food and drug law will not in any sense deprive the public of the right of self-medication. On the contrary, it is the purpose of the bill to protect the public when it purchases remedies for self-medication. The drug sections of the new bill go into this matter in detail. The bill says that a remedy must not claim to cure a disease for which it is only a palliative. It says that no false claims must be made for the curative powers of any remedy. It says that the words, "Warning--May be habit forming", must appear on the labels of remedies which contain narcotics and hypnotics. It says the label must give complete and explicit directions for use and that the remedy must not be harmful to the user when taken as directed on the label.

I ask you whether these requirements would be there if the law was intended to outlaw self-medication; if the law covered only medicines used by doctors. Doctors know the things that the proposed law will require to be stated upon the labels. Those requirements are included in the Copeland bill so that laymen may be properly informed about the medicines they decide to take when they do not wish to consult a doctor. The new food and drugs act, like the old, is predicated upon the basic assumption that people will continue to medicate themselves in the future as they always have in the past. The new law therefore seeks to give maximum protection to the health and the pocketbook of people who treat their own ills. It is false, misleading and absurd to say that the new bill will prohibit either self-diagnosis or self-medication and will demand that all sick people go to medical doctors.

What is the significance of this opposition to the Copeland bill? What will the situation be if Congress fails to enact this law? It will mean that some of the things that I have been telling you about in this series of radio talks will continue uninterrupted and uncontrolled. It will mean that a worthless weed concoction can still be sold, unrestricted, as a cure for diabetic patients while the unsuspecting sufferers go to their death; that a horse liniment can continue to be sold as a remedy for tuberculosis, locomotor ataxia, pneumonia, and other ills without any power on the part of your Government to prevent it unless it can be shown that the manufacturer knowingly made his false curative claims. It took the Government nearly ten years to obtain the evidence necessary to put such a horse liniment out of business. Even if the Government can prove, as is required under the present law, that the manufacturer knows the worthlessness of his product and can thereby force him to remove his claims for the treatment of diabetes, tuberculosis, locomotor ataxia, pneumonia and other diseases from his labels, the Government will still be unable to prevent this same manufacturer from advertising his weed concoction or his horse liniment as a treatment for these diseases, in the press, on

the radio and in other advertising mediums.

There is no reason anywhere in the realm of logic why the American people should be exploited to the detriment of their purse or health simply because the Government does not have at its command a law sufficiently specific to control such perniciously objectionable traffic. All the Department of Agriculture seeks in recommending the passage of the Copeland bill is that manufacturers shall deal fairly and decently with the consuming public. I am glad to say that the bulk of our American manufacturers do this already. Many food, cosmetic and drug manufacturers see eye to eye with us in this matter. It is incredible to me that so many manufacturers whom I believe to be inherently respectable are siding with the criminally-minded in their industry who alone are responsible for present unsatisfactory conditions and are bitterly opposing any move intended to strengthen the law.

The Department of Agriculture in advocating the passage of the Copeland bill is not committed to an unduly lofty and impossible ideal. It is not urging extraordinary concessions on the part of American manufacturers. It is merely asking that the consumer be given a square deal and in the name of decency I ask why this is not the consumer's right. We are not demanding that the consumer be given a privilege. We are only demanding that the Government be placed in position, by the passage of proper legislation, to see that the consumer receives what he is entitled to as a matter of every-day justice.

The whole issue which is before the nation today, and which will be actively before Congress in a few weeks, is whether this bill shall be defeated on the pretext that it interferes with business. Mind you, it is only the business of the manufacturer who seeks to cheat or endanger the public that will be hampered. Is it unreasonable to provide a measure for your protection against those abuses which have heretofore enriched manufacturers of innumerable nostrums at the expense of the unsuspecting consumer?

If the efforts made by your Government officials for years, and now approaching culmination, to obtain adequate control legislation do not appeal to the public as a matter worthy of concern and support, then Congress cannot be blamed if it defeats this measure. If it is the will of the people of the United States that present conditions should continue, at least the Department of Agriculture will have a consciousness that it has done all it can to place the true situation before the public and to recommend an adequate remedy. In a few days now the Department of Agriculture will lay your case--the case of the people of the United States--before the Senatorial Committee which will give first consideration to this bill. We shall make a plain, unvarnished statement of the need for additional public protection as we recognize it. We shall try to make it clear that the requirements sought to be imposed by the Copeland bill are reasonable and will accomplish the purpose in mind. It is comforting to know that there will be support for the enactment of this measure from the respectable elements of the food, drug, and cosmetic industries, but it is safe to assume that the opposition, because of its inherently selfish character, will be vastly more voluminous and more vociferous. I have an abiding faith in the sound judgment of the Congress of the United States. I believe that the men you have elected to represent you in Congress are capable of cutting through the fallacies which have been spread abroad, and if they are convinced that the American public needs this increased protection, will pass a law which will give it to you in full measure.
